

Extended Essay

In what way are the themes
and style of "Rosencrantz
and Guildenstern are Dead"
by Tom Stoppard related to
"Waiting for Godot" by
Samuel Beckett?

Session: May 2007

Subject: Group 2, English

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Wordcount: 3989

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Abstract

The two plays *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* by Tom Stoppard both feature two protagonists who are waiting for a third person to appear and give meaning to their lives. I was attracted to these two works by my interest in modern theatre. This essay investigates the similarities and differences between these plays, in order to answer the following research question:

In what way are the themes and style of "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead" by Tom Stoppard related to "Waiting for Godot" by Samuel Beckett ?

The scope of my investigation will be the thorough analysis of the two plays themselves, supported mainly by the secondary sources *Tom Stoppard: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* by Roger Sales, the semi-biographical *Tom Stoppard* by Roger Whitaker and literature on the underlying philosophy of Existentialism.

The themes of despair and waiting for life to become meaningful permeate both plays and represent the causes for the protagonists' search for occupations. While Rosencrantz and Guildenstern pass the time with word games and pondering about the meaning of their existence, Vladimir and Estragon, similarly, turn to desperate attempts at conversation or hanging themselves. The pairs of protagonists interact as if they were at the same time bound to and disgusted by each other. At the same time their relationship with the audience is an ambivalent one. They need to be watched to make sense of their lives, but nevertheless tease the spectators. Watching the audience or other actors perform theatre on stage for them, they reverse their traditional roles.

I conclude that Stoppard's play represents a more narrowly defined and humorous mix sui generis, not an imitation of *Waiting for Godot*. He plays around with, merges, and parodies *Hamlet* and *Godot*, creating something entirely new and fascinating.

Word count: 299

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In what way are the themes and style of "*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*" by Tom Stoppard related to "*Waiting for Godot*" by Samuel Beckett?

I. Introduction

For an intellectual audience in the 60s, watching one of the first performances of "*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead*", the resemblance must have been stunning: two characters from "*Hamlet*" on stage, both male, trying to pass the time in a plot which condemns them to wait passively for events and persons to come, certainly must have reminded them of Samuel Beckett's "*Waiting for Godot*". The situation of the two main characters as well as their attempts to pass the time could seem a mere imitation of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Thus the following research question arises:

In what way are the themes and style of "*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*" by Tom Stoppard related to "*Waiting for Godot*" by Samuel Beckett ?

A great part of the philosophy of the 20th century was dominated by Existentialism. Propelled by famous writers such as Jean Paul Sarte and Albert Camus, it was to influence a whole generation of authors, among them Samuel Beckett, whose "*Waiting for Godot*" would change the way the world viewed theatre, provoking thoughts and audiences. Its title seems to provide a quite accurate description of its content. Two tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, try to pass the time, while they are awaiting the arrival of the mysterious Godot. The misery of this exercise in word games and vulgar jokes is interrupted by the master Pozzo with his slave Lucky, and disturbed by a boy, a messenger from Godot, who announces that they were waiting in vain. Despite the fact that Godot is not going to come, they resume their struggle for meaningful occupation. Told to try again the following day, they return and experience what seems to be a variation of the events of the day before, with Godot missing his appointment anew.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead, by Tom Stoppard, tells the story of two servants from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, destined to an unfortunate fate. Ordered by King Claudius to find the cause of young Hamlet's troublesome behaviour they set out to question him, but are vanquished by Hamlet's witty rhetoric. Eventually they are to accompany him to England, bearing a letter that requests him to be killed immediately. However, the young prince secretly substitutes the names of his two clueless companions for his own, sentencing them to an undeserved death. Stoppard's play portrays the waiting and the uncertainty of the lives of the two "baser natures...between the pass and fell incensed points of mighty opposites"¹. It depicts their perspective on the arbitrary and obscure events at the Danish court, drawing its stylistic sources, captions and questions from a wide range of literary sources and predecessors. Thus the perception of the play by an audience can differ immensely depending on its literary background and knowledge of contemporary theatre.

I will use the following approach to the question: At first I will treat the general themes of the two works and the situation their protagonists find themselves in. The second section will then explore how these themes translate into the relationship to the audience and the actions on stage of the characters, leading on to a comparison of the structure of the plays in the third part. The next section will treat the motifs of waiting and attempts to pass the time, followed by the final section that examines the interaction between, and characterisation of, the characters.

Although many secondary sources can be found which treat Beckett's play in detail, they are scarcer where it comes to Stoppard. Comparisons between the two plays are hard to find and are hardly explored in depth. Thus I had to rely on much primary research and the

¹ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (London: Penguin Books, 1980), p. 190/191

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few titles which cover this topic, of which I found the interpretation by Roger Sales and the literary biography by Thomas R. Whitaker to be the most fruitful works for my investigation.

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II. Seeking a Sense

At the beginning of both plays the lights go up and the spectators are confronted by two men on stage, in *Waiting for Godot* two old tramps and in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* "two Elisabethans"². The obvious thing they have in common are their attempts at passing the time, because they seem to have no other occupation. There is "[n]othing to be done" as Estragon tells his companion Vladimir at the beginning of *Waiting for Godot*.

In fact, Beckett's play gives the initial impression of being written "without...knowing how to go on"³, which can also be perceived in Stoppard's play⁴, which he himself described as "a sort of infinite leap-frog"⁵, devoid of an intentional existentialist theme, created "to entertain a roomful of people"⁶. However, existentialism can clearly be considered to be one of the underlying philosophies of Beckett's play. The lack of any higher meaning in the lives of the protagonists and the persistence in their waiting remind us of the experience of the absurd, which Camus⁷ conveyed in a similar manner. However, in contrast to the latter, in Beckett's play this condition does not provide freedom and the opportunity to develop freely, devoid of worries about transcendental states. The lives of Vladimir and Estragon rather give the impression of an endless struggle, not being led by heroes but by a pair of tramps, whiling away their time with word-games.

In *Rosencrantz* the protagonists find themselves in a similar situation: They are "seeking a sense of direction and purpose"⁸. Their actions are neither directed towards or contributing to, nor really incorporated into the plot of *Hamlet*, but more or less interrupted by it. Their participation in Shakespeare's play seems to spring less from choice than from coincidences. This disorientation gives the audience an impression of missing out on the important things which is reflected by the lack of orientation and control seen in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Although they never really move they cannot escape the "royal summons"⁹ which will eventually lead to their death. Hamlet's actions seem to them as arbitrary as Godot's to Vladimir and Estragon. They are left with the absurd question of what to do with their time and they try to solve it by "play[ing] at questions"¹⁰. Likewise, Vladimir and Estragon find themselves trying to fill the "theatrical spaces"¹¹ with words that become ever more the subject of themselves.

The uncertainty and ambivalence on stage is in both plays constructed around the quote from St. Augustin's account of the crucifixion: "Do not despair – one of the thieves was saved; do not presume – one of the thieves was damned."¹² Thus, life is portrayed as the flipping of a coin, like the one Rosencrantz and Guildenstern play with in the first Act, which constantly betrays mankind's "faith...in the law of probability"¹³. In *Godot* these two sides

² Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 11.

³ Ronald Hayman, Quoted in Roger Sales, *Tom Stoppard: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (London: Penguin Books, 1988), p. 31.

⁴ Roger Sales, *Tom Stoppard: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (London: Penguin Books, 1988), p. 31.

⁵ Tom Stoppard. Quoted in Thomas R. Whitaker, *Tom Stoppard* (London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1983), p. 44.

⁶ Thomas R. Whitaker, *Tom Stoppard* (London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1983), p. 43.

⁷ Manfred Pfister (Ed.), *Waiting for Godot* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 1987), p. 146.

⁸ Sales, p. 144.

⁹ Stoppard, p. 19.

¹⁰ Stoppard, p. 42.

¹¹ Sales, p. 145.

¹² St. Augustin. Quoted in Manfred Pfister, appendix to *Waiting for Godot* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 1987), p. 115.

¹³ Stoppard, p. 12.

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manifest themselves in the fact that the shepherd is punished by Godot while the goat-herd is not, for which no explanation is offered¹⁴, which gives their lives the same arbitrary character as in *Rosencrantz*. Above all, the theme of interchangeability is represented by the actions of the two main characters of both plays.

¹⁴ Sales, p. 143

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III. Ambushing the Audience

Some of the most obvious reflections of *Godot* in *Rosencrantz* are the characterizations and the relationship between actors and audience. Expecting to see actors on stage conveying some entertaining plot and imitating reality, the spectators may be surprised to see two people who are just as disoriented as the audience itself. As the play goes on, they will see the actors who are supposed to be watched becoming the audience of a theatre-on-stage themselves. Just as the guests have come into the theatre to be entertained, Vladimir and Estragon and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern turn to watching to pass the time. In *Godot* the entrance of Pozzo and Lucky seems to promise "a more conventional theatrical plot"¹⁵ but it turns out that Pozzo, being used to a traditional script, seems strangely out of place in the minimal scenery which Beckett describes with scarce language¹⁶. Several times Pozzo starts off with a supposedly entertaining speech, but finds himself lost, asking, "What was I saying?"¹⁷. Reaching for something to hold on to he even needs Estragon to "beg... ask... beseech" him to "be seated", before he can actually go about doing so, highlighting his need of conventional stage directions. When he eventually performs his speech on the night, he quickly disappoints Vladimir and Estragon, because "his inspiration leaves him"¹⁸, and he turns out to be just as self-conscious and in "need of encouragement"¹⁹ as everyone else on stage.

Similarly, the return to "real" theatre and plot that the Player in *Rosencrantz* initially seems to offer, in fact consists of a decline to "filth"²⁰ as Rosencrantz denounces it furiously. The promised theatre is nothing more than "a comic pornographer and a rabble of prostitutes".²¹ Where Pozzo feels lost on stage with his affiliation for traditional theatre, the Player has already noticed that "Times being what they are"²² there is no choice but to "do on stage the things that are supposed to happen off"²³. This statement applies to the whole play: cutting nails, waiting for something to happen and watching actors, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern seem to have decided to turn the traditional roles "inside out"²⁴ by living on stage and watching the world play, instead of vice versa.

All these allusions to theatre and the existence of an on-stage audience reflect upon the spectators' experience. They are forced to "generate the meaning"²⁵ themselves because on-stage everything is uncertain. At some point, they even find themselves being watched and confronted by the actors, giving up every conventional notion of a fourth wall. In *Godot* the audience sees two dirty old men reviewing the evening that is "awful...worse than the pantomime"²⁶. One of them, Vladimir, has a weak bladder which he goes to empty off stage, accompanied by a comment by Estragon on the location of the bathroom in the theatre, that is the "end of the corridor"²⁷ behind the stage, thereby destroying any theatrical illusion. All these unpleasant incidents manifest the appalling effect Beckett intended to have, whereas Stoppard lets his audience spend the evening with two somewhat more pleasant young men.

¹⁵ Sales, p. 145

¹⁶ Sales, p. 145

¹⁷ Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 1987), p. 33

¹⁸ Beckett, p. 43

¹⁹ Beckett, p. 44

²⁰ Stoppard, p. 29

²¹ Stoppard, p. 27

²² Stoppard, p. 27

²³ Stoppard, p. 28

²⁴ Stoppard, p. 28

²⁵ Gerry Dukes, *Samuel Beckett* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), p. 87

²⁶ Beckett, p. 39

²⁷ Beckett, p. 39

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Instead of provoking his audience, he teases them. Beckett's deliberate bad taste is substituted by more direct but less repulsive offences on the people watching. For example, the two Elisabethans do not only "stare at [the] audience"²⁸, sometimes "with contempt"²⁹, but Rosencrantz even wishes them to "burn to death in their shoes"³⁰, after he has unsuccessfully tried to tease them with a false fire-alarm. They conclude that their state is like being "kept intrigued without ever quite being enlightened"³¹, which probably reminds the audience of their own fate. Yet when they decide to "play at questions" it promises just a short escape from the boredom, although a less extreme one than the desperate solution Vladimir and Estragon come up with, that is, to hang themselves.

Considering all the uncertainties on stage the qualification of the couples as actors might seem doubtful, especially considering their seemingly improvised dialogues. Fortunately, the other characters offer clues as to what their profession is. Pozzo's remark that they belong to the "same species"³² as the entertainer himself, who enjoys the attention Vladimir and Estragon pay him so much that he tries to prolong his stay, is mirrored by a more explicit comment by the Player, recognizing Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as "fellow artists"³³. This, obviously, opens up the way for several other interpretations of the plays. The eternal evening in *Godot*, whose dusk only comes when the Acts draw to their ends³⁴, filled by the same repetitious actions every time, definitely resembles the routine of the actors on stage who return everyday in front of a new audience. Similarly, the death of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is certain through the title, but the next day they will perform again, repeating the waiting, the uncertainties and the deaths. This is expressed in a condensed way by the sudden resurrection of the Player in Act 3, who is thought to be stabbed to death by Guildenstern, but quickly emerges as alive as before, showing the sliding blade. Afterwards he further illustrates Stoppard's point by a variety of theatrical deaths acted out by the Tragedians³⁵, reminding the audience once again of the artificiality of what they are seeing.

²⁸ Stoppard, p. 58

²⁹ Stoppard, p. 60

³⁰ Stoppard, p. 60

³¹ Stoppard, p. 41

³² Beckett, p. 23

³³ Stoppard, p. 23

³⁴ Beckett, p. 62 and 110

³⁵ Stoppard, p. 123 f.

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IV. Nothing happens ... thrice

It has been remarked, that *Waiting for Godot* is a play in which "nothing happens, twice"³⁶. Although not entirely correct, this statement definitely has a valid point where it comes to structure. Both acts start with the actors appearing on stage and trying to pass the time with conversations, but they are interrupted by the arrival of Pozzo and Lucky, who can be seen as either a disturbance or a diversion, and who leave after a while³⁷. The theatrical void is filled by a boy who informs the two tramps that Godot will not "keep his appointment"³⁸. Nevertheless, they decide to return the following day. However, this structure is distorted in *Rosencrantz*.

The inclusion of the third act and the attempt at combining Shakespeare and Beckett lead to a less concise structure in Stoppard's play. The dialogue of the two protagonists is interrupted at regular intervals by the Tragedians, but the interruptions by Hamlet and other characters from Shakespeare's play seems even more arbitrary. The result is a more "excessive"³⁹ kind of drama, differing from Beckett's minimalist play especially in the relative multitude of characters⁴⁰, the looser structure and the more prosaic way language is used⁴¹. It is "a constant chatter"⁴², in contrast to the frequent passages of silence in *Godot*. In fact, it would hardly have any resemblance with *Godot* at first glance, if it was not for the obvious similarity of the main characters and other rather concrete allusions in *Rosencrantz to Godot*. Probably one of the most notable incidents is the scene when Rosencrantz's trousers "slide slowly down"⁴³, in a comic attempt to stop Hamlet from escaping by means of trapping him with a belt, which parodies the more disturbing event of Vladimir loosening "the cord that holds up his trousers"⁴⁴ to hang himself with it. Another similarity is the way the Player on the one hand, and Pozzo and Lucky on the other hand, enter the stage. At first the servants, Lucky and the Tragedians enter in both, *Godot* and *Rosencrantz* respectively, carrying their material burdens. Lucky is laden with a "heavy bag"⁴⁵ and "picnic"⁴⁶ equipment, whereas the Tragedians push a cart and carry various instruments with them⁴⁷. Interestingly, these are the props which will be used by their masters, Pozzo and the Player, who enter afterwards, to create their conventional theatre in two quite unconventional plays. The entrance of these two is in both plays accompanied by commands and directions for the people they are in company with, who are thus immediately recognizable as subordinate to them. Obviously, although the two entertainers are both praising the product they are offering, which promises to be first and foremost a diversion, they value it differently. While Pozzo at first does not tolerate Vladimir and Estragon interrupting him in his attempts at entertaining them and only afterwards seeks to satisfy his "need for encouragement"⁴⁸, the Player frankly declares that even "a single coin"⁴⁹ would be enough because the real reward both are looking for is the fact that "somebody is *watching*"⁵⁰. Their lives would be meaningless without the audience, which

³⁶ Vivian Mercier. Quoted in Sales, p. 148

³⁷ Sales, p. 148

³⁸ Sales, p. 148

³⁹ Sales, p. 149

⁴⁰ Compare Stoppard, p. 6-7, with Beckett, p. 4

⁴¹ Sales, p. 146

⁴² Sales, p. 149

⁴³ Stoppard, p. 89

⁴⁴ Beckett, p. 111

⁴⁵ Beckett, p. 22

⁴⁶ Beckett p. 22

⁴⁷ Stoppard, p. 21

⁴⁸ Beckett, p. 44

⁴⁹ Stoppard, p. 22

⁵⁰ Stoppard, p. 63

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could also be interpreted as the wish for a deity, a higher being, who could give meaning to their "lonely"⁵¹ lives, whose arbitrariness would probably lead to despair otherwise. The Existentialism that lies at the root of their assumed atheism did not free them but has substituted other human beings for god.

Both pairs of protagonists are, deliberately or not, bound to Hamlet or Godot, who escape clarification by rhetorical, and intellectual superiority, or simple absence. Thus they are left alone with each other, trying to create meaning themselves by playing shallow word games. From time to time deep insights pass through their minds, but their inability to choose and direct leads to their failure to derive any sense or purpose from them. Instead of a development we can see Vladimir and Estragon vanishing behind the curtain in the same way as they entered the stage, that is, in absurd immobility in contrast to a final verbal attempt to resist it:

VLADIMIR: Well? Shall we go?

ESTRAGON. Yes, let's go.

(They do not move)⁵²

⁵¹ Beckett, p. 14

⁵² Beckett, p. 112

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V. Games of the Absurd

It has often been argued that Beckett leaves *Godot* "open to almost any kind of interpretation"⁵³ and does not seem to offer a resolution of any kind. However, Stoppard limits this freedom and the possible fates for his protagonists definitely to a lethal one, firstly through his inclusion of *Hamlet*, which mentions the death of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, secondly through the quite explicit title of the play and the frequent allusions to death, one of the major philosophical problems the protagonists discuss. Although their own death is acted out in front of them, they refuse to accept this omen, but eventually they cannot prevent the "design of tragedy"⁵⁴ from becoming real. The certainty of an end to their lives is something consoling for them, because it promises an existence, a limited amount of time to be filled with meaning.

*"Existence precedes Essence."*⁵⁵

This belief of Existentialism on the one hand offers something to hold on to, because "eternity is a terrible thought"⁵⁶, but on the other hand it forces them to look for something worthwhile to do on their way between their mother's womb and being "stuffed in a box"⁵⁷. Like Vladimir and Estragon, caught in their eternal cycle of waiting, they rely on games and "music hall routines"⁵⁸ to pass the time. The futility of the coin game in *Rosencrantz* which inescapably leads to the same outcome⁵⁹ can be found in *Godot* in a hat game which is played by Vladimir and Estragon, passing three hats between them and putting them on several times just to finish with the same hats they were wearing initially.

Interestingly, both kinds of props do not only serve as things to play around with but also as indicators of change. In *Rosencrantz* the sudden appearance of "tails"⁶⁰ after a long row of "heads"⁶¹ that defied probability ushers in the interruption by characters from *Hamlet*⁶², whereas the putting on of a hat in *Godot*⁶³ is the trigger for Lucky's famous speech⁶⁴, consisting of "a theological... argument,...a verbal trap... and...a collection of contradictions"⁶⁵. After all, these games do not yet provide enough diversion from the fact that there is nothing to be done. Therefore Rosencrantz and Guildenstern try to fill the gaps with conversation. However, because there is not much to talk about they talk about talking and even rehearse real conversations to vanquish the arbitrary nature of words, albeit in the end their attempt is futile, because eventually they are "murdered"⁶⁶ rhetorically by Hamlet. Despite their efforts, they cannot make sense of Hamlet and thus of their lives and, close to despair, they express their confusion by their inability to determine the direction of the sun.

⁵³ Sales, p. 144

⁵⁴ Whitaker, p. 42

⁵⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre. Quoted in Oskar Zarate und Richard Appignanesi. *Introducing Existentialism* (Icon Books. Cambridge 2001) page 135

⁵⁶ Stoppard, p. 71

⁵⁷ Stoppard, p. 71

⁵⁸ Sales, p. 148

⁵⁹ Stoppard, p. 11-16

⁶⁰ Stoppard, p. 34

⁶¹ Stoppard, p. 11-30

⁶² Stoppard, p. 34

⁶³ Beckett, p. 49

⁶⁴ Beckett, p. 49-53

⁶⁵ Anselm Atkins. 1966. *The Structure of Lucky's Speech*. In *Beckett: Waiting for Godot*, edited by Ruby Cohn. London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1987

⁶⁶ Stoppard, p. 57

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Analogous to his more extensive use of stage design and props, Stoppard employs an "invariably prosaic"⁶⁷ language, contrasting with the strictly minimalist and sometimes "genuinely poetic"⁶⁸ *Godot*. Whereas Vladimir and Estragon often remain awkwardly silent, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are constantly chatting. Especially Guildenstern impresses by philosophical speeches, for example on the law of probability⁶⁹ or the nature of experience⁷⁰. Such loquacity can in *Godot* only be found in Lucky's speech, which is also generally notable about the two plays: Stoppard uses a more patronizing style and leaves his play less open to interpretations.

The absurd is narrowly confined in *Rosencrantz* and death is the frame for the games on stage, constantly brought back into the mind of actors and audience by reminders such as the death of the "two spies"⁷¹ in the Tragedian's performance of *Murder of Gonzago*, in which "art...mirror[s] life"⁷², - at least the artificial one on stage. In *Godot* even death loses its finalizing authority and does not inspire awe and fear in the two tramps, but merely provides for another tasteless joke on an "erection...with all that follows"⁷³, allegedly engendered by the act of "hanging"⁷⁴ oneself. Dying is not depicted as dreadful but seems another viable option to escape the waiting and gain the small bit of certainty which Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are also struggling to find.

⁶⁷ Sales, p. 146

⁶⁸ Sales, p. 147

⁶⁹ Stoppard, p. 17-18

⁷⁰ Stoppard, p. 21

⁷¹ Stoppard, p. 84

⁷² Stoppard, p. 81

⁷³ Beckett, p. 16

⁷⁴ Beckett, p. 16

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VI. Portentous Pairing

The roles in both pairs of protagonists are quite clear-cut: There are the more philosophically interested Vladimir and Guildenstern who dominate the conversation and seem more discontent with the uncertainty of their situation, in contrast to the more basic problems Estragon and Guildenstern turn to, such as "pulling...toes"⁷⁵ and "cutting...fingernails"⁷⁶ respectively. This relationship is highlighted in their reactions to the entertainment offered by the Player and Pozzo.

While Guildenstern rejects the idea of taking part in the "obscene"⁷⁷ performance offered by the Player, this only represents a more vulgar parody of the fact that Vladimir is "scandalized"⁷⁸ by Estragon's behaviour in response to Pozzo leaving "chicken bones"⁷⁹ from his opulent meal behind. In contrast to his companion's philosophical concern with the "scandal"⁸⁰ of Lucky's treatment, Estragon is driven by his more carnal concern with his hunger to beg "timidly"⁸¹ in a self-inflicted act of subjugation for Pozzo's leftovers "on the ground". Likewise, Rosencrantz follows his drives by calling back the Player when he eventually realises that what he offers is not art but prostitution. Self-consciously he is torn between his secret desire and his morals until he bursts, "shamed into fury"⁸².

This contradiction between his feelings and words and the ensuing dissatisfaction which is blamed on the artist seems to mock critics and the audience simultaneously, mirroring a possible reaction to the play *Rosencrantz* itself, in which Stoppard deliberately teases the audience with sexuality and "filth"⁸³, and to *Godot*. After all, the provocatively disgusting relationship between Vladimir and Estragon is blunted in *Rosencrantz* to remove its confrontational edge with audiences and becomes a simple mocking.

⁷⁵ Beckett, p. 8

⁷⁶ Stoppard, p. 18

⁷⁷ Stoppard, p. 27

⁷⁸ Beckett, p. 28

⁷⁹ Beckett, p. 28

⁸⁰ Beckett, p. 29

⁸¹ Beckett, p. 28

⁸² Stoppard, p. 29

⁸³ Stoppard, p. 29

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VII. Conclusion

While investigating the research question: **In what way are the themes and style of "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead" by Tom Stoppard related to "Waiting for Godot" by Samuel Beckett ?**, it has become obvious that *Rosencrantz* does not present a mere imitation of *Godot* but instead a parody, drawing many of its themes from it but develops them further. Based on existentialism, both plays show their protagonists waiting in an arbitrary world without any higher meaning, apparently in vain. However, where Beckett creates a repulsive atmosphere of despair and decay, Stoppard humorously teases the audience and, by incorporating *Hamlet* and the most notorious incidents from *Godot*, creates a fascinating parody of theatre itself. He supports this by highlighting the theatre-on-stage, drawing upon Pozzo's appearance in *Godot*, and thus reflecting upon role and meaning of the audience itself. In a more eclectic and prosaic style, relative to the strictly minimalist *Godot*, Stoppard lets life become a game of probability, which is finally terminated by death, enabling his protagonists to escape the daily return to the same place, which is performed by Vladimir and Estragon, but not the sense of futility in their search for meaning.

In the end, it is difficult to define Existentialism as a whole as a "creed", because it argues that there is no higher meaning and refers to a group of philosophers who can only be loosely associated. The reference of both plays to artificiality and life being a stage itself engenders even more uncertainty. What makes our lives more worthwhile than the shallow word games we see on stage? Perhaps, after all, it is just an infinite series of reflection and parodies of others, an eternal evening of jokes, while we are waiting for the curtain to fall. Forever.

In what way are the themes and style of “Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead” by Tom Stoppard related to “Waiting for Godot” by Samuel Beckett?

VIII. Bibliography

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